

11/17/22, 5:45 AM

Facebook censors award-winning journalist for criticising the WHO - The Post

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BY FREDDIE  
SAYERS  
Thursday, 11  
February 2021



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## Facebook censors award-winning journalist for criticising the WHO

An article was labelled misinformation for asking questions about China



It looks like something plucked straight out of another age, a foreign culture where freedom of expression is always subject to a censor's whims. Not only is it labelled 'False Information' but the accompanying image is greyed out, a design no doubt honed by the 'user response experts' at Facebook to dissuade users from clicking on it.

But this is the UK in 2021 and the post is an [UnHerd article from yesterday](#) that has now been labelled as misinformation by Facebook.

First, the article itself. Ian Birrell, a [multi-award-winning](#) investigative reporter and former deputy editor of the *Independent*, has been closely following the question of the origins of the Covid-19 virus within Wuhan for much of the past year. He was [unimpressed](#) with the hastily concluded World Health Organisation investigation, and the way in which some potential explanations were thrown out with the encouragement of the Chinese regime. Considering the WHO's recent history in this regard, this kind of journalistic scrutiny is vital.

So on what basis is the article censored? We registered our objection to Facebook's decision but, as usual with the tech giants, there is no genuine appeals process. There is no visibility or accountability on who made the decision, nor the rationale behind it — once again, the atmosphere is strongly reminiscent of undemocratic regimes. Who do they think they are protecting with this? The WHO? China?

Earlier in the pandemic, YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki announced that anything that deviated from WHO guidelines would be removed from the platform — and one of *UnHerd's* videos last summer was temporarily taken down on that basis. No doubt it is a similar sensitivity here.

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7 mins

Why we need World Cup nationalism

GILES FRASER  
4 mins

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ARIS ROUSSINOS  
6 mins

Sinn Féin has given up on a united Ireland

SHANE ROSS  
4 mins



But really it's a perfect case study of the philosophical knots the tech elite are tying themselves into: eager to please a new Democratic administration, they are trying to enforce a particular world view by making it sacred and unquestionable instead of simply persuading people of its merits. Supposedly authoritative and apolitical bodies like the WHO are crucial building blocks of this official version of truth. But if you can't scrutinise or question it, what chance does it have of remaining true?

In the UK, this is all going to become very relevant this year, as the Government is currently in the pre-legislation phase of the 'Online Safety Bill,' a response to Theresa May's 'Online Harms' white paper. Partially aiming to crack down on serious harms like terrorism and child abuse online — which most right-thinking people would support — it also strays into the dangerous zone of policing 'misinformation' and 'disinformation'.

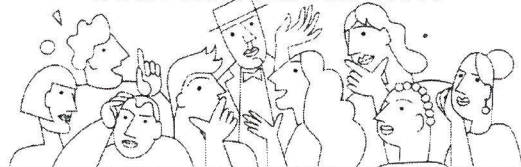
I've been assured that the policy approach will be mindful of the need to protect free speech, and avoid creating structural incentives for media and tech platforms to err on the side of censorship. But, since the harrowing experience of this pandemic which has turned many people's politics upside down, expect a battle. It will pit the renascent authoritarian Tory instinct to protect (see Priti Patel's [call only yesterday](#) for social media networks to censor anti-vaxx posts) directly against the Tory instinct to preserve freedom. The Government will need to decide which is really the greater danger to our society: allowing some whackos to spread crazy theories, or entering a world in which a journalist's awkward questions about the Chinese Communist regime are pre-emptively censored from British readers?

It's a chance for Britain to lead the way in rebalancing powers against the big tech hegemon — we'll see if the Government takes it.

*Update — Facebook has apologised for wrongly accusing Ian Birrell and UnHerd of spreading misinformation: 'This was a mistake on our part. A fact-checking label was wrongly applied to this post yesterday & it was removed earlier this morning. We're very sorry for any inconvenience or confusion caused.'*

...

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46 COMMENTS

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**Christina Dalcher** 1 year ago

At the risk of repeating an old and tired quip (but, seemingly, a necessary one these days):

Orwell's 1984 was a warning, not a how-to guide.

I think at this point the only way to disempower Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram is to simply remove their product from the shelves. And since that product is us, it's in our power to do that.

I'm an author (a sometimes-bestselling-author, a sometimes-meh-kind-of-author). I closed down all my social media accounts in September 2020, and guess what? Nothing bad happened. I still talk to people. I still see pictures of their silly pets. I still support them and argue with them and share a laugh with them. Also, I still sell the occasional book.

We can do this, folks.

74 1 REPLY



**Nigel Clarke** 1 year ago

Reply to [Christina Dalcher](#)

We can do this, folks

Things needed to disempower FB, Twitter etc

Locate Server Housings

Large Missile

Target Lock

Missiles away...

It's the only way

7 1 REPLY



**Joe Blow** 1 year ago

Reply to [Christina Dalcher](#)

You're right – but we should go further.

1.) FaceBook and Twitter should be regulated by the FCC, and fined extremely aggressively if they censor without a court order.

2.) Repeal Section 230, so that if they 'print' anything illegal or libelous they can be taken to court.

FaceBook and Twitter are cancers on our society.

20 1 REPLY



**Christina Dalcher** 1 year ago

Reply to [Joe Blow](#)

I think the second item alone would do the trick. ☺

5 1 REPLY



**Andrew Thompson** 1 year ago

Reply to [Christina Dalcher](#)

I'm out too. Almost 9 months clean.

8 1 REPLY



**DC** 1 year ago

Reply to [Christina Dalcher](#)

It's not Facebook. It's us (or, at least, many of "us") who are demanding a low-risk, highly-sanitised daily feed at the trough. Facebook et al have become the rose-tinted spectacles through which we view the (brave new) world.

4 1 REPLY



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**Drahcir Nevarc** · 1 year ago

Reply to [Christina Dalcher](#)

Excellent advice, thanks.

0 · [REPLY](#)



**Drahcir Nevarc** · 1 year ago

Reply to [Drahcir Nevarc](#)

Oh, and I finally quit FB for good six years ago.

2 · [REPLY](#)



**Stanley Beardshall** · 1 year ago

Reply to [Christina Dalcher](#)

I am not usually smarter than the average bear, but have never had a "social media" account. Years ago, when I first saw Facebook, I couldn't see how it would improve anyone's life and now realise that it actually worsens many. My wife looks at it to see photos of grandchildren in foreign parts, but her profile is totally fictitious and we use Facebookpurity and Adblock to stop most of its garbage. Cleggie works for them so that should be enough to warn thinking folk off....

3 · [REPLY](#)



**Simon Denis** · 1 year ago

The whole notion of "protecting people from misinformation" is a totalitarian ruse. Individuals should be allowed to make up their own minds. It is not as if there are so few sources of news that they can't make comparisons. Yes, people should certainly be shielded from deceitful propaganda; but propaganda differs from mere "misinformation" in a number of obvious ways. First, it is relentless. Second, it rarely stoops to argument. Third, it monopolises the media and finally it prevents, distorts and criminalises dissent. None of these criteria apply to Mr Birrell's piece; in fact, they apply to the causes of which Big Tech approves. It is not a case of the "pot calling the kettle black"; more a case of the pot declaring indignantly that the snow is black. And it's about time that the pot in question were consigned to the rubbish tip.

63 · [REPLY](#)



**Mauricio Estrela** · 1 year ago

Reply to [Simon Denis](#)

Yes. What they truly want IS to be able to use it entirely as propaganda. It goes like every other media: newspapers, radio, TV, now the internet. Any place where people find some freedom will be targeted for government control.

6 · [REPLY](#)



**Saul D** · 1 year ago

So here we are in the 2020s and the world has glorified advertising companies in control of free speech...

We're due for a Punk revival...

33 · [REPLY](#)



**Swiveleyed Loon** · 1 year ago

It's over. That exciting experiment of universal suffrage combined with free speech has suddenly and without warning passed into the history books.

Next stop, burning history books.

22 · [REPLY](#)



**Roland Ayers** · 1 year ago

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And any pre-2020 immunology text book mentioning herd immunity.

10 REPLY



**Joe Francis** · 1 year ago

Once you see the words "independent fact checkers", you know you're about to get hosed.

20 REPLY



**Richard Lustenberg** · 1 year ago

The WHO sent a team composed of it's most corrupt insiders to investigate the possible Wuhan leak. Among them, Marion Koopmans, who also put her signature to the DrÅlsten paper, the foundation for the PCR tests used throughout the world.

18 REPLY



**Chris Jayne** · 1 year ago

Thanks for highlighting this Freddie. It is tech, but it isn't just tech. Much of the media, big corporates via HR, education, much of the public sector, plus supra-national political bodies. They have decided that their view of the world is the truth.

16 REPLY



**Fraser Bailey** · 1 year ago

Evil, but not unexpected, because the tech giants have been doing stuff like this for some time. Meanwhile, most of the politicians seem to be years behind the curve, or actually supportive of this informational and mind control.

13 REPLY



**Simon Denis** · 1 year ago

Reply to Fraser Bailey

Modern politicians fall into four categories: mindless authoritarians – Hancock, Patel; collaborators who know it's wrong – Johnson and Mogg; doubtful, confused babble merchants – the vast majority of MPs and courageous, old-style leaders – Brady, Redwood and a few more. The last group has almost no influence at all.

18 REPLY



**Andrew Fisher** · 1 year ago

Reply to Simon Denis

I'm not sure what this has to do with the behaviour of the tech giants.

And given your very negative view of the politicians, which may be fair enough, the temptations of power being, well, very tempting, your faith in Rees Mogg is almost touchingly naive. Where is the great libertarian rebellion from him? – he is an outright supporter of the government.

0 REPLY



**Katharine Eyre** · 1 year ago

Well done for calling this out. A worrying sign indeed. To me, what FB is doing in this case seems vastly more dangerous than allowing a few crazies to talk nonsense and letting their audience make up their own minds.

13 REPLY



**Alex Lekas** · 1 year ago

Private companies may not owe you anything. That doesn't mean their actions can't be bad for free speech. Free speech is more than a legal principle. It needs to be a broadly held social value for it to matter.

It's not FB's job to be the hall monitor. Nor is it the role of private enterprise to be the outsourcing provider of things govt cannot legally do – like silence critics, opponents, and heretics.

10 REPLY



**Andrew Harvey** 1 year ago

Reply to [Alex Lekas](#)

FB (and Google and Twitter, etc) should either be a platform or a publisher. It can't have it both ways.

14 REPLY



**Fraser Bailey** 1 year ago

Never forget that Nick Clegg has a very good job with the repulsive organisation that is Fb.

9 REPLY



**Mark Gregory** 1 year ago

Reply to [Fraser Bailey](#)

Ummmm, "Never forget that the repulsive Nick Clegg has a well rewarded job with the equally repulsive organisation that is Fb". There, fixed it.

11 REPLY



**JR Stoker** 1 year ago

Is not the answer simply to accept that Facebook and all the others are publishers, not "platforms"? They prove it time and time again by the degree of control over what they consider "fit to print". Then they can be subject to the law regarding publishing, including libel.

9 REPLY



**G Matthews** 1 year ago

The only surprise is that Freddy seems surprised by this. Guys, unless you want Nick Clegg determining what you can and can't think then you need to deactivate all Facebook, Insta and What'sApp, also Twitter, now. Oh and cancel your TV license while you are there.

9 REPLY



**David Simpson** 1 year ago

It is both incredible and truly frightening that a perfectly respectable piece of journalism, which I read and commented on, should have been treated in this way. I cannot believe that there is no legal remedy (the European Court of Human Rights?) that can be applied against FB.

8 REPLY



**Paul Goodman** 1 year ago

Amazing how they contrive to cancel any considered alternative view and yet allow the most obvious drive to thrive unabated. Nevertheless the notion of having a twitter or facebook account at all is equally bonkers. Why would you?

7 REPLY



**Dennis Boylon** 1 year ago

Dont use facebook. They are evil.

7 REPLY

**Andrew Thompson** 1 year ago



Reply to [Dennis Boylan](#)

I'm almost 9 months clean now.

4 REPLY



**Drahcir Nevarc** · 1 year ago

Reply to [Andrew Thompson](#)

I'm six years clean.

0 REPLY



**George Lake** · 1 year ago

Mark Zuckerberg should change his name forthwith to Suckerberg, for that is what he is, if not even worse.

6 REPLY



**Alka Hughes-Hallett** · 1 year ago

Very interestingly , today I read that BBC's licence has been refused renewal in China for reporting on Uighurs.

Facebook is already banned in China.

I think the problem here is is not that these platforms have a special left or China leaning but that they have their own moral code of sorts.

Truth can be complicated and fair reporting has to put two views forward so that an impartial and balanced ideas can emerge from it.

Cancelling and blanking ideas is a poor form of reporting. No good can come out of it in the long run.

2 REPLY



**4davidmm** · 1 year ago

The correct response is that every newspaper in this country should print the article. So in this globalist utopia we have US government / US tech telling us what we can and cannot read about a World body reporting on the origin of a virus that threatens us all. Who'd have thought it?

2 REPLY



**Peter KE** · 1 year ago

FB the face of evil, the world would be better without it.

2 REPLY



**Andrew Harvey** · 1 year ago

Call me naive, but I feel like Facebook has really crossed a line here.

1 REPLY



**voodooopolitics** · 1 year ago

The link is working in the US.

1 REPLY



**pgstokes1** · 1 year ago

What a world

1 REPLY



**Andrew Baldwin** · 1 year ago

I left a comment on Ian's post, saying it was good, but he pulled his punches. Perhaps he deliberately pulled his punches to avoid the Big Tech goons censoring him, to no avail. It seems that Mark Steyn is right. It's China's world, and we just live in it.

1 REPLY



**Joe Blow** · 1 year ago



Of course, the censors will only ever censor bad things. Not things that they shouldn't.

Don't worry. Clegg says it will be OK.

1 REPLY



**Annette Kralendijk** 1 year ago

Can the author actually be surprised by this behavior? How is that possible?

1 REPLY



**Peter Fisher** 1 year ago

What are you doing on Facebook in the first place? If you truly believe in freedom of speech, democracy, accountability, etc. you would never be on it. What did you expect from a cabal of neo-Marxists when you critique Communists? It's like sticking your hand into a basket of venomous snakes and then complaining that you got bitten. That's not fair on the snakes, they serve a useful purpose in the food chain, where as the only purpose of social media is to create division in society.

1 REPLY



**Peter Dale** 1 year ago

Remember Lord Acton: 'All power tends to corrupt; absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely.' We are seeing this here. The most recent contre-temps with Australia is on point.

I have never been on any of the 'social' media platforms and would never dream of doing so.

If anyone wants to understand the business model underlying these oligarchies, read Shoshana Zuboff's 'Surveillance Capitalism'. It's big, but it gives you a full understanding of what drives these companies.

One of the major defences, oddly supported by socialists, is that they are private companies and can do what they want. As a matter of fact, they cannot. They have to comply with government regulations to get listed on the various stock exchanges and they must abide by various laws forbidding discrimination of many sorts. Governments could, if they so wished, legislate to forbid the banning of people who express contrarian ideas. All it takes is political will. And that won't occur until these companies overstep their reach and offend someone or group really powerful. And then corrective action will happen.

1 REPLY



**Phil Bolton** 1 year ago

Where are the lines of what is acceptable (and not) and who draws them up? This is the problem. Social media firms don't want the job but they are in the firing line. Different countries/societies have different Governments and different norms (often driven by religious beliefs) so there is no global acceptance. What is censorship and what is extremist propaganda? It's a testing question that we don't have an answer to.

0 REPLY



**John McClelland** 1 year ago

Allow everything or nothing

0 REPLY



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